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**BLACK LABOR IN THE CITIES: A Selected Bibliography**

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## BLACK LABOR IN THE CITIES:

## A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

by

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PREFACE

If we define a worker as a person who is relatively free to exchange his labor for some form of remuneration in a market context, then with very few exceptions, we are forced to conclude that the Black worker did not come into existence until slavery was ended with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in December 1865.

Slavery, however, did not stop the development of skills among either the slaves or the freemen for that matter. In fact, as we review the occupational history of Black people, we find that aside from those skilled artisans employed in various capacities on the plantations, most Blacks who followed the various mechanical pursuits practiced their crafts in the cities and towns of the old South, and the new North. It is with the end of the Civil War and gathering storm of industrialization, however, that the Urban Black worker acquires increasing prominence in the labor force of the United States.

For the most part, this prominence has manifested itself in the use of Blacks as a temporary stopgap thrown into the breach of a continuing string of emergencies brought on by a suddenly appearing labor vacuum. This was true at the

turn of the century, and was even moreso throughout the period of the First World War, World War II, the Korean Conflict, and the War in Viet-Nam. As might be expected, as soon as the crisis had passed, the urban Black worker soon found himself out on the street. Since he was the last hired, it quickly became a certainty that he would be the first fired.

A second point that can be made, is, given the use of Blacks in this manner, it is clear that the Black worker is responding to a crisis, or whatever opportunity is open to him comes as a consequence of some social discontinuity. The result of this situation is that the Black worker is never able to put down any kind of solid root that would enable him to acquire sufficient skills to move upward in the occupational structure. This locks the Black worker onto the lower rungs of the occupational ladder in such a fashion that he rapidly becomes unnecessary, leading to Wilhelm's question, "Who Needs the Negro?" What obtains, then, is a circular path in which the Black worker goes from slave labor to unskilled labor to semiskilled labor to no labor at all.

The implications of this path for policy considerations and for urban development in general are starkly revealed when considered in the historical context, hence the inclusion of numerous historical references in this bibliography. The government publications listed, should be considered as an up-to-date data source for the renewal, evaluation, or analysis of the positions taken by the authors of the various historical pieces.

In compiling this bibliography, I have tried to cite only those sources that dealt specifically with the topic of Black labor in the cities. Actually, however, any discussion of the role of Blacks in the American labor force after 1918, implies discussion of an urban labor force since this is the year usually cited as the end of the first of the Black mass migrations.



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